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INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 9158
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 8720
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3792
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0353
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 003070

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: OUTREACH TO ASFUNDYAR WALI KHAN AND CHAUDHRY NISAR

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In separate discussions with Ambassador September 19, Awami National Party leader Asfandyar Wali Khan and Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Chaudhry Nisar both said they were encouraged by signs that some local tribes had decided to rise up and fight militants. Khan said candidly that the Pashtuns accepted occasional air attacks, especially if they targeted foreigners, but daily air attacks or the presence of U.S. ground troops were very unhelpful and undercut the GOP's efforts to encourage locals to combat militants. Nisar was cagier, noting that U.S. attacks over the past few weeks hurt the hearts and minds campaign; he called for more transparency in the bilateral relationship and reserved the right to criticize U.S. actions to remain politically credible.

¶2. (C) Khan, who recently complained to Chief of Army Staff Kayani about the slow pace of military operations in Swat, praised Pakistani military action in Bajaur, which has been made more difficult by militant control of a network of tunnels. Khan hinted that the reason Baitullah Mehsud had not responded to U.S. attacks on a Haqqani-controlled site was that the Pakistani Army had made a secret deal with the Waziri tribe. Nisar shared his view that relations between Zardari and the Army were troubled. While noting Zardari's thin majority in the parliament, Nisar pledged to be a responsible Opposition Leader but suggested that Zardari should consult the opposition if he wanted support on critical economic reforms. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Ambassador and Polcouns met September 19 separately with Awami National Party (ANP) leader Asfandyar Wali Khan, who was elected September 18 to be the Chairman of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Chaudhry Nisar. Nisar was voted in as Leader of the Opposition by the National Assembly earlier that morning.

Reaction to U.S. Action

¶4. (C) Khan said candidly that the Pashtuns accepted occasional air attacks, especially if they targeted foreigners, but daily air attacks or the presence of U.S. ground troops were very unhelpful. Noting that local tribesmen were just beginning to take up arms themselves against the militants, Khan said this was what had to happen to defeat the Taliban. For this strategy to succeed, however, the GOP had to win a hearts and minds campaign with the tribes, and U.S. unilateral action undermined this campaign.

¶ 15. (C) Khan asked, "Where is Baitullah Mehsud? Siraj Haqqani is the big boss and Baitullah is his commander in chief. After you hit the Haqqani compound, why didn't Mehsud react?" Khan went on to suggest that the U.S. carefully examine the statement made by the 4,000-strong Waziri jirga that met earlier this week. According to press statements, the jirga said the tribe would ally with the Pakistani military to defend Pakistan against U.S. attacks; it also said that if the attacks continue, the tribe's ceasefire agreement with the military would be canceled.

¶ 16. (C) Nisar told Ambassador that former President Musharraf had been tainted in Pakistani eyes because he was seen as too pro-U.S., so Musharraf's campaign against the militants was also seen as a U.S. war. To turn that around, Pakistanis must see the war as their fight against an insurgency. Nisar avoided saying that PML-N opposed either air attacks or U.S. ground action. What he did say was that the PML-N would have to criticize the GOP for allowing U.S. action. Otherwise, said Nisar, the party would have no credibility with the people. He called for more transparency about U.S. policy and actions saying that confusion bred unhelpful conspiracy theories.

Military Action

¶ 17. (C) Khan said he had met this week with Chief of Army Staff General Kayani in one of their regular discussions about military operations in the Northwest Frontier Province

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(NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Khan praised the Bajaur operation as the only serious military action to date and asked Kayani why the Pakistani security forces had made so little progress in Swat. Khan reported that he had given the Army the location/coordinates of Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammmadi (TNSM) leader Maulana Fazlullah and urged them to strike the location or ask the Americans to strike, but nothing happened. Khan noted that because of historical discouragement, the Swatis have few weapons with which to fight back without support of the Army.

¶ 18. (C) Referring to two separate instances September 18 in Dir (NWFP) in which locals turned on militants, Khan said he was increasingly encouraged by signs that tribes were fed up with the Taliban. He related two stories where information from local tribesmen resulted in the police seizing rocket launchers and heavy weapons from militants hiding within the community. Khan said he urged the locals near Bajaur to revolt against the militants; in response one town leader said they would like to rise up but, in a community of 500 people, they had two AK-47s and only a handful of ammunition. Ambassador noted that Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mullen had discussed September 17 with Kayani the need to help the GOP reward tribes that were taking anti-militant action; the U.S. was helping civilians who had fled the fighting in Bajaur and would explore ways to help these tribes as well.

¶ 19. (C) In Bajaur, Khan confirmed what we have heard from Army and Interior Ministry sources. The militants are using an elaborate system of tunnels, most likely created in the 1980's mujahadeen days, to evade capture. This has made the Army's task of clearing the area much more difficult. Local tribes are raising lashkars (armed tribal posses) to assist the security forces, said Khan. But he worried about what will happen when the Army has to move to Mohmand Agency; according to Khan, after the Waziristans, Mohmand has the largest concentration of mujahadeen-era inter-marriages between foreign militants and local tribes. Khan said that Pakistan faced difficult times ahead--"this is going to be bloodier than Afghanistan, and we have to be prepared for it."

¶ 10. (C) Nisar also told Ambassador that he was optimistic

about the "first stirrings" of a popular revolt against the Taliban. Asked about relations between the GOP and the military, however, Nisar responded that they were not good. The Army, claimed Nisar, was exhausted and needed to be energized to fight militancy. Despite surface indications of good will, Nisar said there was deep distrust of Zardari among senior military leaders. He noted the coincidence of Zardari filing his nomination papers to run for president on the same day that the Swiss announced they would return USD 60 million in frozen assets to Zardari. Zardari needed to take the first step of reaching out to the Army, but there were few incentives on the part of the civilians or the military to resolve their differences.

New Opposition Leader

¶11. (C) Ambassador met Nisar just after he had been voted as the new Opposition Leader in the National Assembly. Pakistan Muslim League (PML) leader Pervaiz Elahai resigned from the position on September 14, in a move that many analysts saw as a precursor to a plan for the PML and the Pakistan People's Party to oust Nawaz Sharif's PML-N party from power in the Punjab. In a press conference September 18, Nisar said he would work to convince President Zardari to repeal the 17th amendment, resign as co-chair of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and restore the deposed judges. Nisar was also appointed to become the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee that reviews spending of all the ministries.

¶12. (C) Nisar said that after Musharraf's resignation, there should have been more space for the U.S. and Pakistan to work together under a civilian government. He was concerned that with the events of the past few weeks the two sides had lost an opportunity and urged that we find a way to better manage the relationship. As always, Nisar insisted that he and the PML-N were pro-American. (Saying that his wife and children in fact are American, Nisar did admit that he went to the U.S. Embassy in London to renew his daughter's

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passport because he wanted to avoid being seen at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.)

¶13. (C) Nisar urged that we engage in a kind of catharsis at both the governmental and non-governmental level. He wanted to focus on young parliamentarians and was also reaching out to the UK to establish an exchange program for them. Nisar said that, after the Eid holiday, he would share some ideas for ways to diffuse anti-Americanism in Pakistan. Ambassador agreed to encourage ties between the U.S. and Pakistani parliamentarians and organize some training programs for the staff of the Public Accounts Committee. Nisar admitted that introducing transparency and accountability in the GOP would be a huge challenge.

¶14. (C) Insisting several times that he will be a responsible opposition leader, Nisar claimed that the PML-N had learned the lessons of the past 8-10 years and would now ensure that democracy in Pakistan works at both the center and in the Punjab. He went on to note, however, that Zardari has only a six seat majority in the central government. That means that Fazlur Rehman, the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), or the FATA parliamentarians alone or acting in some combination can bring down the government. He pledged to help PM Gilani fight off blackmail from any of the groups but noted that the MQM was already making demands. In Nasir's view, the PPP has a blood feud with the PML, which will find it very difficult to support Zardari, either in the center or in the Punjab. He admitted there was a PPP sub-group trying to destabilize PML-N rule in the Punjab but hoped that Zardari would back off and not push Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif into a corner. This, said Nisar, would be unhelpful for everyone.

¶15. (C) Ambassador asked if the PML-N would support the economic reforms and international financial institution (IFI) backing required to restore market and investor confidence. Nisar said the PML-N would strongly oppose an official International Monetary Fund (IMF) package but understood the need for some sort of IFI blessing to entice investors back. But he urged Zardari to take the opposition into confidence if he wants their support. Nisar noted that former PML-N Petroleum and Privatization Minister Khwaja Asif agreed to see Zardari on September 19, possibly to discuss privatization issues.

¶16. (C) In closing, Nisar noted that this is potentially the most powerful Pakistani government that he has seen in 25 years -- they control the presidency, the prime ministership, three provincial assemblies and four governorships; they have a friendly Army chief and a compliant judiciary. Yet, they have not managed to get anything accomplished because they have been too closeted on political party lines.

¶17. (C) Comment: There is a growing convergence of views among Pakistani politicians that U.S. attacks undermine nascent local efforts to rise up against the militants; we will continue to seek ways to help the GOP reward those efforts. Nisar appears to be positioning himself to be a candidate for Prime Minister if the Sharifs are disqualified in the upcoming battle with the PPP over control of the Punjab. Nisar is at heart a nationalist, and he will be an eloquent and formidable Opposition Leader. But he does recognize the need to stay in the good graces of the U.S., and we should invite him to Washington when an opportunity arises. We have offered Khan and his Foreign Affairs Committee a briefing on U.S. development assistance and military/intelligence operations; he also plans to be in New York around October 10. We also understand that former Interior Minister Sherpao will soon be in New York for a Council on Foreign Relations event.

PATTERSON